

news from the

Department of Community and Human Services

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Boards & Commissions

The following boards and commissions provide oversight and guidance to programs of the Department:

Alexandria Community Policy Management Team

Alexandria Community Services Board

Children, Youth & Families Collaborative Commission

Commission on Aging

Commission on Employment

Commission for Women

Economic Opportunities Commission

Social Services Advisory Board

Workforce Investment Board

*A Caring
Community*

*Promoting Respect,
Recovery, Hope*

Mike Gilmore Retires From The Helm At DCHS

Mike Gilmore, Ph.D., retired this January. Dr. Gilmore, who preferred “Mike,” came to the City in 2003 as the Executive Director of the Alexandria Community Services Board and Director of the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse. Following the 2010 merger with Human Services and the Office on Women, Mike became director of the new Department of Community and Human Services.

While reflecting on significant changes in the delivery of behavioral healthcare over the years of his career, Mike cited the increasing emphasis on service provision in the community versus inpatient care. “People with mental illness, an intellectual disability and even a substance dependency, who would have stayed in a hospital 20 years ago, now live, and live productively in the community. People would have said 10 years ago ‘That’s not possible.’ The problem is being able to reinvest the resulting savings in the continuum of care.”

Mike commented on the increasing integration of behavioral health with primary health care. “Behavioral health services are a part of general health care,” he said.

Mike recalled the initial meeting of the Department at the onset of the merger. “I felt such a sense of excitement, (with

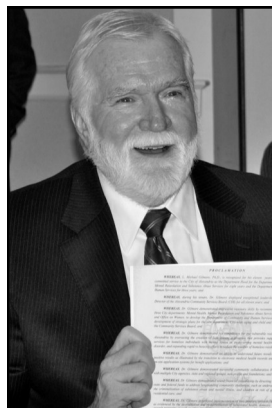
anxiety of the unknown), yet I really felt something neat was happening. I hope we will realize the advantages of full integration of all DCHS services.”

With appreciation, Mike spoke of the work of several DCHS volunteer groups: Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center, the Fund for Alexandria’s Child, the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria and their Mental Health Anti-Stigma group.

Mike’s fondest memories are of the employees at DCHS. “What I have enjoyed most are the people here - wonderful people doing wonderful work. It’s the people who make all the difference.”

There’s no shortage of activities Mike would like to do in retirement. Foremost, he will be with his wife, Mary Anne. Mike would like to learn to play the piano they have sitting in the kitchen, build a stone wall and grow a garden at his home in Lexington, Virginia, read his collection of Modern Library books (1940’s era are his favorites), learn Japanese and maybe live in Japan for six months, write the three screenplays he has in his head (which he says are as good as the Netflix he watches on weekends), teach Youth Mental Health First Aid, and perhaps do some writing about his experience with Action Learning Groups.

At Mike’s “Good-bye to the Tie” retirement celebration, more than 250 people, including staff, community partners and clients, came out to honor Mike, his leadership, compassion and his career. *(For an overview of Mike’s accomplishments see pg 4.)*



Dr. Mike Gilmore holds a proclamation praising his work.

Everyone Grows When Children with Disabilities Play

Providing opportunities for children with disabilities in settings alongside their normally developing peers is a primary focus of early intervention. The Parent Infant Education (PIE) program's inclusive community playgroups afford this opportunity, and the children with and without disabilities and their families both benefit.

Infant Development Specialist Patricia Eitemiller and Alexandria Community Services Board member Erin Croyle, who attends playgroup, were selected to present at the 29th Annual Early Childhood Conference in San Francisco. They described the community benefits of inclusive playgroups and showcased the success of the City's PIE playgroups. See a video of Patty in action with Alexandria children involved in inclusive play.

Patty coaches parents on how to support development and learning for their children and provides additional guidance for parents of children with disabilities. One parent states, "Being able to stand back and watch others lead the children helped me see what I need to do to encourage their skills." The combination of structured and free play prepares children for preschool and later, kindergarten. One mother says, "This is an activity that both my children and I can participate in. My son enjoys playing with the other children and I get to share parenting ideas with other parents and the leader." Another parent said, "The children have no idea that they are different from one another. They all play the same."

Patty, along with colleague Deatrice Williams, also conducts "child finds," identifying children who may have disabilities and could benefit from early intervention, often before the parent or caregiver is aware. In addition to the inclusive playgroup, Patty and Deatrice visit the trained [parent-led play groups](#) of-



Children engage in serious play at the PIE playgroup.

ferred through the Center for Alexandria's Child. In these groups, they can refer for services children showing red flags and answer parent questions about child development.

So often parents of children with disabilities hear what their children will not be able to do. What's meaningful to Patty is seeing parents learn to believe in what their children *can* do. As one parent said, "When we are here, my son goes with the flow. Sometimes I think 'he can't do that,' then I get a nudge from the facilitator and he surprises me."

The inclusive playgroup is held Wednesdays at 10 a.m. in the Lee Center's Therapeutic Recreation Sensory Room. It is free to *all* children from birth to age four who live in the City of Alexandria.

Group Home Resident Finally Gets a Real Home

The Seminary residential program for persons with intellectual disabilities welcomed a new resident who successfully transitioned from Central Virginia Training Center following the Department of Justice Settlement Agreement that moved persons from institutions to the community.

Monitoring visits found the new resident was adapting to her environment and enjoying community living after 56 years in an institution. She discovered relatives she had never known, and who now visit.

She is just one person who has been given a new life thanks to the plan to transform the system of care for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Virginia. This plan is designed to accelerate Virginia's move away from reliance on five large training centers to a community-based system of services and support for persons with intellectual and other development disabilities.

The plan was developed after review of the following factors: the declining census in training centers, aging facility infrastructure, nationwide best practices, an improving community-based services infrastructure, and Virginia's recent settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, which requires significant expansion of the community-based system of services for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities over a ten-year period.

The Department of Justice Agreement follows the Supreme Court ruling that supported that unjustified isolation of individuals with disabilities is a form of unlawful discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Parent Cafés Offer Ideas to Strengthen Families

Social workers from the DCHS Child Welfare Services joined colleagues from local community partner agencies for a workshop in a new approach to engaging parents. Called Parent Cafés, these gatherings are a way of facilitating conversation among parents about the protective factors that keep families strong.

The trainees spent two days learning by doing. They participated in a café complete with lunch, tablecloths, flowers and information. They discussed the ways that they can help families become stronger by stressing the message that love is not enough – parents need to adopt certain “protective factors,” tried and true methods to keep the family healthy.

The “protective factors” that are the cornerstone of this initiative are: (1) Resilience: Be strong and flexible; (2) Social Connections: Parents need friends; (3) Knowledge: Being a great parent is part natural and part learned; (4) Concrete Support: We all need help sometimes; (5) Competence: Parents need to help their children communicate; and (6) Healthy Relationships: Give children the love and respect they need.

The parent café training was hosted by CWS with funding provided by the Innovators for Success Initiative, a project designed to reduce child abuse and neglect by strengthening the families. Jacqueline Lusk, Chief of Family Services for DCHS Child Welfare, along with Virginia social services officials

traveled to Chicago to learn about the program. Lusk was so impressed with the concept and the strategies that she lobbied for bringing the program to Alexandria.

Parent Cafés are being used in localities around the country in parent-friendly environments like early childhood centers, schools, community centers, recreation centers, churches, and public libraries. Like the training sessions, the cafés provide the food and the ambience that helps parents feel comfortable and safe sharing their thoughts and feelings. The cafés also offer information on community resources available to families.



A trainer facilitates discussion at a Parent Café for DCHS staff.

Ex-Offender Finds Help, Opportunity Through CORE Program

Going to prison can be a frightening experience. Ironically, being released from prison can be just as frightening. Returning to a community where there is no caring family, no job and perhaps no home, can test the strength of the toughest person. But for persons with serious mental illness, returning to a community with no supports can be devastating.

Fortunately for Dallas, when he returned to Alexandria from prison, The Collaboration for Recovery and Re-Entry (CORE) program was there to help him engage with a network of caring professionals who created a web of support to help him adapt to his new environment and to address his mental illness. Before arriving in the city, he was given the contact information and appointments for a therapist, mental health probation officer, psychiatrist, and additional resources to help him adjust to life in the community. He was able to stay on his medication, get help with emotional issues and improve his life.

Research shows that having a meaningful daily activity is essential to success for an individual in Dallas' position. His team helped him enroll in the D.C. Central Kitchen Culinary Job Training Program in Arlington. When transportation, conflicting appointments, or his living situation became barriers to success, his team helped him problem solve and stay on track. He attended classes eight hours a day, Mon- Fri for 12 weeks. On February 7, he graduated. At



From left to right: Case Manager Dana Wolfolk; Dallas; Probation Officer Kim Settle; and Therapist Michelle Albert.

graduation, not only did Dallas receive his completion certificate, he was also presented with three awards of excellence: Most Improved, Perfect Attendance and Life Skills, which included a gift card. On February 8, he began a job at a Cuban restaurant in DC.

CORE is a partnership between the Department of Community and Human Services and State Probation and Parole aimed at helping offenders with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders live healthy and law abiding lives in the community. The coordinator provides intensive case management and care coordination; while the Mental Health

Probation Officer takes a firm but fair approach to community corrections.

The Mental Health Probation Officer carries a caseload of 40 compared to the average probation caseload of 70 to 100 which allows for closer care coordination. The CORE/Jail Diversion Coordinator and the Mental Health Probation Officer work together very closely, carry similar caseloads, and speak almost daily. With this approach the program has seen a 74% reduction in the number of days clients spend in jail. In July 2013, CORE expanded to include a Mental Health Probation Officer with Alexandria Criminal Justice Services and continues to see successful outcomes. For questions about CORE, contact the coordinator at michelle.albert@alexandriava.gov.



Department of Community & Human Services
2525 Mount Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22301

Mike Gilmore Retires (cont.) Highlights of His Accomplishments

Mike, during his tenure, led the Department in the:

- Community implementation of Mental Health First Aid Training (and served as a trainer himself)
- Securing of A New Lease on Life grant funding in collaboration with Arlington CSB and Alexandria Neighborhood Health Services to provide medical services co-located at mental health centers for clients with untreated, chronic diseases
- Merger of three departments: Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse; Human Services, and Office on Women, to develop the Department of Community and Human Services and the subsequent DCHS strategic plan
- Creation of a Safe Haven, a program that provides supportive housing and services for homeless individuals with mental illness
- Formation of a seasonal DCHS staff basketball team, the Shooting Stars, to annually compete against the Wizards, a Special Olympics team of adults with intellectual disabilities who live in City residential programs
- Implementation of best practices and accreditation of DCHS behavioral health programs
- Integration of child and family serving programs with non-profits to develop innovative programs such as the Child Assessment and Treatment Center for Health (CATCH) and the Center for Alexandria's Children
- Stewardship in obtaining ongoing state and federal funds to address underage substance abuse, the criminalization of substance abuse and mental illness, and children at risk of going into expensive residential care
- Advocacy for mental health care and funding, and the movement against stigma to make the City of Alexandria a more supportive city for residents with behavioral health



Asst. City Manager Debra Collins and City Manager Rashad Young recognize Mike.

To make comments or suggestions for story ideas, or to receive this newsletter by email, contact Jennifer Cohen at 703.746.3484 or jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov.



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